

Holocaust Remembrance Day: In Context

(Based on an essay by Erica Brown, Torah U-Madda, Vol 9)

R. Mois Navon

~~ National Symbols, Collective Memory, Imagined Communities ~~

Benedict Anderson The deliberate attempt to create collective memory has been termed “the formation of ‘imagined communities.’” Imagined communities arise when the attraction of nationalism supplants interest in organized religion. “It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.”

Erica Brown Not only has the Holocaust become the object of this century’s collective memory, but it has become, in large part, the very cement of the Jewish community. Commemorating it has created national connections and secular traditions.

Erica Brown the Holocaust has been used to create a secular version of Jewish identity, with the necessary accompanying ritual. ...By separating the Holocaust as a unique event, it becomes disconnected from religious readings of history and acquires greater significance in nationalistic approaches to history.

משלי פרק כט פסוק יח: באין חזון יפרע עם ושמר תורה אשרהו:

Emil Fackenheim, God’s Presence in History An evil that has no explanation exists in the world, and the role of Judaism is to survive despite this evil.

Erica Brown Placing this one event above other historical catastrophes may give the calamity the attention it is due, but it feeds into an essentially negative Jewish world view. Michael Wyschogrod criticizes Fackenheim’s thinking as “negative natural theology,” precisely because it does not promote any positive reason for maintaining national identity:

Michael Wyschogrod, Faith After the Holocaust: A Review Essay...

If there is hope after the Holocaust, it is because to those who believe, the voices of the Prophets speak more loudly than did Hitler, and because the divine promise weeps over the crematoria and silences the voice of Auschwitz.

~~ Context ~~

Erica Brown The ancient and recent past resonate with each other when their respective lessons are taught together. Perhaps it is this confluence that undergirds the rabbinic notion that the ninth of Av is a day upon which all Jewish tragedies are marked, with no single calamity the object of exclusive attention.

...

In religious readings of history, placing an event on a historical continuum gives it both significance and a vocabulary drawn from within tradition by which to understand it. If we take the Holocaust out of this continuum, we risk, among other dangers, losing the paradigms of tragedy within our ancient history to understand our recent past. We lose as well the vocabulary of tradition that has helped us confront other catastrophes.

תלמוד ירושלמי (וילנא) מסכת ברכות פרק ב

א"ל בר יודאי בר יודאי שרי תורך ושרי קנקנד דהא חריב בית מוקדשא געת זמן תניינות א"ל בר יודאי בר יודאי קטור תורך וקטור קנקנד דהא יליד מלכא משיחא ...

MN, JPOST: I would like to point out a fatal flaw in the thinking of David Golkin (April 17, 2004, The Jewish Way To Remember), which is really a flaw rooted in how our society as a whole relates to the Holocaust. He writes that making a Holocaust Scroll will serve to preserve the memory of the event by rooting it in formal ritual. However I would counter that it is not the ritual which ensures the everlasting quality of an event but rather its being rooted in positive faith.

... The secret to our eternalizing national events lies not in the ritual we use to remember them, but in our connecting them to that power which is the secret of our very eternity as a nation.

The Pledge of the March of the Living

We pledge to keep alive and honor the legacy

of the multitudes of our people who perished in the Holocaust.

We pledge to fight anti-Semitism, anti-Zionism, Holocaust denial

and all other forms of hatred directed towards the Jewish people and Israel.

We pledge to fight every form of discrimination manifested

against any religion, nationality or ethnic group.

We pledge to actively participate in the strengthening

of Jewish life in the Diaspora and Israel.

We pledge to increase our knowledge of our Jewish heritage

and to pass on a love of Jewish life and learning to the next generation.

We pledge to give tzedaka, to assist in helping the Jewish needy,

wherever they may live in the world.

We pledge to involve ourselves in tikkun olam,

to build a better world for all member of the human family.

After the Shoah the promise of 'Never Again' was proclaimed.

We pledge to create a world where 'Never Again' will become a reality

for the Jewish people and, indeed, for all people.

This is our solemn pledge to the Jewish people, to those who came before us, to those of our generation, and to those who will follow in future generations.

~~ Sefirat HaOmer ~~

R. Soloveichik, Fate and Destiny

The individual is tied to his people both with chains of fate and with the bonds of destiny...

The covenant in Egypt/Fate:

- 1) Shared fate manifests itself as a consciousness of shared circumstances... which binds together all ...
- 2) Experience of shared suffering. The feeling of sympathy is a fundamental feature...
- 3) Shared suffering finds its expression in the awareness of shared responsibility and liability...
- 4) Shared historical circumstances give rise to shared activity ...

The covenant of Sinai/Destiny:

What is the nature of the covenant of destiny? Destiny in the life of a people, as in the life of an individual, signifies a deliberate and conscious existence that the people has chosen out of its own free will and in which it finds the full realization of its historical being. Its existence, in place of simply being the experience of an unalterable reality into which the people has been thrust, now appears as the experience of an act possessing teleological dimensions, replete with movement, ascent, striving, and attaining.

R. J. B. Soloveitchik. Sacred and Profane. Shiurei HaRav pp. 15-18

When the Jews were delivered from the Egyptian oppression ... metamorphosing a tribe of slaves into a "nation of priests", [Moshe] was told by God that the path leading from the holiday of Pesach to Shavuot, from the initial liberation to consummate freedom (Revelation), leads through the medium of time. ...

We may say then that qualitative-time consciousness is comprised of two elements: First, the appreciation of the enormous implications inherent in the fleeting moments of the present. ...eternity may depend upon the brief moment. Secondly, the vicarious experience, while in the present, of the past and future. No distance, however removed, should separate one's time consciousness from the dawn of one's group or from the eschatological destiny and infinite realization of one's cherished ideals.

Historian Paul Johnson: The Holocaust and the new Zion were organically connected. The murder of six million Jews was a prime causative factor in the creation of the state of Israel.

ערכין טז:ב מה נשתנה מצורע שאמרה תורה +ויקרא י"ג+ בדד ישב מחוץ למחנה מושבו? הוא הבדיל בין איש לאשתו בין איש לרעהו, לפיכך אמרה תורה: בדד ישב וגו'.